

Cleveland housing agency to salvage WPA-era murals

Artworks may be incorporated in new units

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CLEVELAND — Murals produced as part of a Depression-era public works program will be spared when a housing project is razed next year.

Walter Leedy, a local art and architecture historian, believes the work should be reincorporated into the development that will rise from the rubble at the site of Valleyview Homes overlooking Cleveland's industrial Cuyahoga Valley.

"The art will be saved. The question is what will happen to it," Mr. Leedy said. "Will it disappear into storage and slowly rot or will it be brought back and reused? I think it should be reused."

The last resident was transferred in mid-December out of the flat-roofed, brick Valleyview buildings that were considered cutting-edge in design and construction when they were built in 1939.

The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority will replace

the hillside complex with a less dense configuration of housing for low-income people as part of a multimillion-dollar development partially financed with federal money.

The CMHA must remove and preserve the artwork paid for by the Work Projects Administration, the federal program that provided employment and income to skilled and unskilled workers during the Depression.

A glazed mosaic by W. Leroy Flint on the exterior of the community center shows an overview of the estate.

Twenty-four decorative glazed terra cotta tile panels by Henry Keto are set into the breezeway separating the center recreation wing from the office wing.

Inside the recreation room, on opposite walls, are two murals by noted black artist Elmer Brown, depicting Cleveland's past and present, its industry and commerce.

A mural by Louis Grebenak

that hangs in the offices depicts the conception and construction of Valleyview. In the center's basement, a playroom's walls feature eight ceramic bas-reliefs of animals.

Albert Albano, executive director of the Intermuseum Conservation Association in Cleveland, approached CMHA in September, offering to help preserve the work.

"These works individually represent some of the best examples of Cleveland-based WPA art and art vital to the cultural heritage of our city, and in the case of the noted African-American artist Elmer Brown, the work is significant both to Cleveland's social as well as cultural history," Mr. Albano wrote in a letter to CMHA.

CMHA has told the Cleveland Landmarks Commission that it intends to save the art, but has not determined whether it will be incorporated into the development or reinstalled elsewhere.